(c) whether this fund would be operated by the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers; and

(d) if so, to what extent it would be helpful?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) to (d) Yes, Sir. The Planning Commission has made a provision of Rs. 150 crore under Department of Science and Technology in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002—07) for establishing Pharmaceuticals Research and Development Support Fund (PRDSF) for promotion of R&D for drug industry. Government have decided that the said fund shall be operated by the Department of Science and Technology for the aforementioned purpose. Necessary follow-up action has been initiated by the Department to make the Fund operational.

Exposure to mercury poisoning in India

3257. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Centre for Science and Environment has undertaken a green rating project and found India being exposed to high levels of mercury poisoning, due to the companies producing caustic soda and chlorine, as reported in the Times of India of 3rd September, 2002, under the caption, Green rating sounds mercury alert; and

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard and the preventive steps proposed to be taken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Decline in science students

†3258. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been a considerable decline in number of Science students during the last few years;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, the reasons for such decline and the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that it has been due to non-availability of required apparatus and materials and less teaching hours; and

(d) if so, the action being taken by Government in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT [DR. (SHRIMATI) RITA VERMA]: (a) to (d) There is no reported decline in the number of students in science courses at Senior Secondary stage. However, to encourage students to continue their education in basic sciences at higher education level, a scheme called "Kishore Vaigyanik Prothsahan Yojana" (KVPY) has been launched during 1999-2000 by Department of Science and Technology which targets the young science students at the school and college level. It aims to encourage the students of basic sciences, engineering and medicine to take up research career in these areas.

To improve the quality of science education and to promote scientific temper, funds are also provided to State Governments/UTs/Voluntary Organizations under a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, "Improvement of Science Education in School" which has been operational since 1987-88. Under the scheme, 100% assistance is provided to States/Union Territories for Provision of Science kits to Upper Primary Schools, Setting up/Upgradation of science laboratories, Library facilities in secondary/ senior secondary schools and training of science and mathematics teachers.

Growth of Biotech Industry

3259. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the estimated potential for growth of biotech industry is to the tune of US$ 4.5 billion, by the year 2010;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard and how India's potential compares with that in the world;

(c) whether India has sufficient infrastructure and capability, to tap the potential; and

(d) if so, what steps are being taken to tap the potential, fully?